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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0554/01 1131606
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221606Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1624
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 1184
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2462
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000554

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DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: ABSENT A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, GEAGEA
AND JUMBLATT ON OUTREACH; BERRI'S LATEST GAMBIT

REF: A. BEIRUT 470
[B](#). BEIRUT 551

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Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) On April 22 Speaker Nabih Berri postponed the parliamentary session to elect a president for the 18th time, but this time, did not name a date for the next session. Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea remains intent on courting independent Shia and the Armenian Tashnaq to join March 14 prior to the 2009 parliamentary elections. He pointed to a recent public declaration of support for Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman, organized by members of the Byblos Municipal Council in defiance of Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, as evidence that Aoun is losing support. Geagea hinted at more such declarations to come, particularly from Kesarwan and Baabda. Geagea expressed his concern to the Charge about Hizballah arms transfers to Aoun.

[1](#)2. (C) Meanwhile, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt relayed that Berri is focused on two main issues, electoral law and a national unity government, and seems to have dropped his demand for a ten-ten-ten cabinet division. End summary.

NEED ARMENIAN TASHNAQ

[1](#)3. (C) Days after visiting NEA A/S David Welch met with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, the Charge paid a visit to Geagea in Maarab on April 22. Advisors Elie Khoury and Joseph Nehme and PolOff also attended the meeting. "It is important to maintain the status quo, at least in the short term," Geagea told the Charge. He said he still believes March 14 should try to move the Armenian Tashnaq away from Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun (Ref A), but added that it would not be easy. Bad blood with Phalange leader and former president Amine Gemayel and majority leader Saad Hariri are mere pretexts for why Tashnaq is not already allied with March 14, he explained.

[1](#)4. (C) It is really about its tight relationship with Hizballah, Geagea continued. To shift the Tashnaq, he argued, someone needs to go make a bargain, rather than make

an appeal based on shared principles. He noted that the Armenian Patriarch, Aram I Keshishain (whom the Charge met earlier the same day, septel), is not on good terms with the Tashnaq and cannot make public statements against the party.

WORKING ON THE SHIA

¶5. (C) Also focusing on courting independent Shia, Geagea told the Charge that he recognized Ahmed Assad's "feudal" approach was not a winning proposal, but noted that there were few alternatives "with real weight" that could help March 14 win the 2009 parliamentary elections. Categorizing the independent Shia as either intellectual (and often apolitical) or feudal, Geagea listed three other names worth considering: Khalils, Hamadis, and Sheikh Toufali. (Note: We have been meeting with former Ambassador Khalil al-Khalil. Sheikh Toufali, from Baalbeck, is a former Hizballah Secretary General and wanted criminal. End note.)

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¶6. (C) Geagea reported he is pushing Assad to bring them all together. To date, he said it has been difficult getting Khalil al-Khalil with Assad and therefore is targeting his brother Nasser Khalil, who he dubbed more lenient. Assad and Toufali had a good meeting together, Geagea relayed, but Toufali's legal problems present a challenge and he has refused Geagea's offer of legal assistance. Geagea rejected working with Mufti of Tyre Ali al-Amin, saying he lacks credibility.

AOUN "LOST" IN BYBLOS,
MORE DEFEATS TO COME

¶7. (C) Referring to an April 18 public declaration of support for Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman, organized by the Byblos Municipal Council (Ref B) in defiance of Aoun,

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Geagea predicted that Kesarwan and Baabda would be the next towns to demonstrate their support for Sleiman, at the expense of Aoun. Hinting that the LAF G-2 was fomenting these declarations of support, Geagea believes certain areas are being prompted by the LAF's intelligence division because Aoun has susceptible deputies in Byblos, Kesarwan, and Baabda. The goal is for the public demonstrations to pressure Aoun's MPs so they may be unwilling to continue supporting him, Geagea conjectured.

HIZBALLAH RESUMED ARMING AOUN

¶8. (C) Geagea said that approximately six months ago, Hizballah was providing between 500 and 700 pieces of arms from Syria to Aoun. The issue was raised with the Internal Security Force (ISF), Geagea relayed, which then conducted raids and effectively halted the arms build up and training of Aoun's men. However, Geagea continued, two weeks ago the arms transfers were resumed, in particular, to northern Metn (Dekwane) and Jbeil. Noting that the G-2 and ISF are aware, Geagea said the G-2 is reluctant to take action but that the ISF is monitoring the situation.

¶9. (C) Geagea expressed his concern that Lebanon is again moving towards violence, adding that Hizballah now has enough weapon caches and transportation routes in Lebanon that it no longer needs to ship arms from Syria. The pro-Syrian Palestinian camps also contain large weapon caches, he said.

JUMBLATT: BERRI HAS
DROPPED 10-10-10

¶10. (C) Immediately after the meeting with Geagea, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt called the Charge to report on his 15 minute meeting with Speaker Nabih Berri at parliament earlier in the day. Despite a gathering of opposition and majority MPs at parliament, Berri did not convene parliament to elect a president, nor did he name a new date for a future session.

¶11. (C) Jumblatt said that Berri is focusing on two main issues, electoral law and a national unity government, and has appeared to have dropped his demand for a 10-10-10 cabinet division. Jumblatt noted that Berri seemed to imply he would accept a 13-7-10 or a 14-6-10 division. He received a call from Saad Hariri, still in Riyadh, immediately following the meeting. Jumblatt said that March 14 would soon be forming a unified position in response to Berri -- as soon as Saad returned.

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